



MINUTES
GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM
Third Quarter Council Meeting – Conference Call
September 25, 2012 - 9:30 AM

Call To Order

After establishing a quorum, the meeting was called to order.

Present at the meeting were:

Council Members: Steve Stancil, Chairman,

Council Members by speaker phone: John Bembry, Brent Dykes, Robert Farris, Mark Williams, Paul Michael and Chuck Leavell.

Approval of the Minutes

Chairman Stancil presented minutes from June 18, 2012, Georgia Land Conservation Council meeting for approval. Brent Dykes made a motion seconded by Chuck Leavell to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Review Loan Options for Land Conservation in Georgia

Andrew Szwak stated that he wanted to review the loan fund options available for projects. Staff has tried to make the loan funds more accessible to the conservation projects. In 2008 the Act was amended to allow NGO's as well as local governments to borrow from our loan fund at GEFA. Our first NGO loan was to the Virginia Highland Civic Association and they followed our traditional single borrower model. The pass-through loans are very similar to traditional loans. We have done a few in the past, with most recent would being to Glynn County on Saint Simons Island and Harris County at Callaway Gardens. In 2010 we changed the Act again to allow NGO's to accept bridge loans. These loans allow NGO's with land conservation as one of their primary purposes to acquire land using our loan funds without permanently protecting it at that time. This allows for a more permanent conservation buyer like the Department of Natural Resources to acquire the property later at full fair market value. This change was made to allow the NGO's that are working with the state or federal government to be made financially whole at the end. In 2011 the tax credit act was amended to allow tax credits to be sold and transferred. This opened another possible source of repayment for our GLCP loans. NGO's that accept conservation donations that are eligible for the tax credits can use the proceeds that they anticipate receiving from those tax credits to repay our loans. This can allow the donor to borrow from us through the NGO in order to pay some of the upfront due diligence costs. The donor repays the NGO, which then repays GEFA, on the back end when they receive the tax credit. We have not had a project like this yet but we wanted to make the Council aware that this is an option.

Loan Application

Andrew Szwak stated that The Nature Conservancy seeks to acquire the Boyle Island tract in Wayne County, which is 6,277.80 acres for \$1,800,000. It is primarily covered by floodplain forested wetlands, but also contains oxbow lakes and upland oak hammocks. Many species of birds, freshwater mussels and fish are supported by the tract. Among them are at least three federally endangered species. The property adjoins conservation lands to the north, east and west, and abuts 8.7 miles of the Altamaha River. Following acquisition by The Nature Conservancy, a permanent conservation easement on the property will be sold to the U.S. Navy to prevent encroachments on nearby military lands. Pending Federal grant awards will fund the transfer of the remaining fee-title land interest to the DNR for incorporation into the state's network of wildlife management areas.

Wade Harrison with The Nature Conservancy thanked Steve Friedman with DNR for assembling most of the funding sources and transaction details for this project. We are stepping in to act as the buyer on the seller's schedule but most of the property will go to DNR right after we close on the property. One portion will be withheld until the rest of the funding comes through to get us out of this bridge loan.

Steve Friedman stated that The Nature Conservancy has raised cash for this project and that cash is able to be used as match for the grants that we are going after. Also, I want to thank Andrew and Kevin for their help with this bridge loan because the seller is a publicly traded company and there is no room to miss the closing date. We have applied for a grant that we have scored very well on.

A motion was made by John Bremby and seconded by Robert Farris to approve a bridge loan in the amount of \$1,800,000 for The Nature Conservancy. The motion passed unanimously.

Review of the Tax Credit Program

Andrew Szwak stated that the Department of Natural Resources Board will vote on the final tax credit rules in October. The Act that authorizes the tax credit program was amended in the 2012 legislative session. DNR and State Properties Commission have been working together to implement the changes. The changes are attached as presented.

GEFA's Communication Plan for the GLCP

Andrew Szwak stated that we want to get our communications efforts coordinated. One of our biggest opportunities that Council members identified was for staff to engage in more marketing and communications. Originally back in 2005 GEFA hired an outside consultant to assist with promoting the program, but since 2008 we have operated on our own using program staff and GEFA's public affairs staff to do most of the program promotion. Our efforts have been on an ad hoc basis without a firmly stated direction to whom and what our message should be and what type of media we should use to communicate. Our hope is that a communications plan can be developed with input from Council members as well as agency staff and others in the conservation community that will help make our efforts more targeted and effective. To that end I am asking each Council member to give us your input based around several questions that staff can use to develop the communications plan. We will review the responses at the December meeting.

Emerging Issues

John Bembry stated that the Georgia Conservancy is hosting an annual fund raising event on October 11 at Puratin Mills, they will be honoring Will Harris.

Robert Farris wanted to congratulate John Bembry on being named tree farmer of the year in Georgia.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:57 a.m.

Kim Yawn, Senior Executive Assistant

Kevin Clark, Executive Director